

As he passed the table he reached out one hand, without looking, and grasped the heavy lump of ore.

"You—" he whispered again. And then in louder voice: "She told me—*she told me* about you!"

Harry backed away slowly.

"You—" It came the third time, barely audible, but all the more vicious because of it.

The other spoke. "Don't get a hurry," he said thickly, coming to a stop. "Don't do anythin' rash. Listen to me. She was goin' to ditch you! She was goin' with me—she told me so this afternoon when I come down for candles. You didn't count with her, 'cause she don't amount to nothin'."

He braced his shoulders with lying bravado.

"But I wouldn't 'a' gone. What she was goin' to do to you she might 'a' done to me—some time. An' she wasn't worth it."

The husband's head resumed its natural poise, and the tenseness oozed out of his posture.

The hand holding the chunk of ore commenced to move around on the wrist.

"You—" he whispered weakly. Then he wet his lips. "Are yo' lyin'?"

"I never lied yet!" The other's face drooped. He caught his breath sharply.

"Mebby," he muttered, "mebby, but 'twas you caused it, an'—" Raging, crying, he threw himself at the other.

They went to the floor, the block of ore poised above a white face.

"What's that you've got in your hand?" he screamed, grappling the arm that held the rock.

"Pay-dirt, you— Pay-dirt, an' I'm goin' to smash yer dirty head with it!"

"Pay-dirt! That's right!" cried the under man. "You can kill me; you're bigger an' better! But if you do they'll git you, an' then what good'll that pay-dirt do, eh?"

The poised arm lost its rigidity.

The struggling stopped.

The husband rose slowly to his feet, and walked across the floor, laying the specimen on the table gently, where the sunlight fell on it and glittered.

With his back still turned, he addressed the other.

"I won't take back nothin' I've said," he muttered huskily. "I won't take back nothin'. But we can't afford to—to fall out now—what with that streak lookin' so fine."

HIS PLAY-DAY

A SHORT STORY

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM



YOU are discharged," stated Mr. Roger Harding definitely.

He leaned back in his desk chair as he pronounced sentence on the truck-driver, his dark, im-

passive face without a trace of emotion.

Mr. Harding was not quite thirty-two years old, but he had been trained not to indulge in emotions.

The truck-driver eyed his employer with an air of comical bafflement.

"If you say it, it's so, Mr. Harding," he acknowledged. "But I'd take it kind if you'd remember that I didn't see any way to help missin' that afternoon, sir."

"Why not?"

The driver's ruddy countenance creased, a twinkle drolly illuminated his light-blue eyes.

"I was due for bustin' out, sir," he confided. "My girl got a day off, an' what use was it to her without me?"

"I'm a steady worker, an' I don't never

drink—but I was due to play that day. You know what that feelin' is, Mr. Harding, sir!"

"I am afraid I do not, Timothy," returned Roger Harding, not unkindly, but inexorably, as one who considered life from the same view-point as he considered the heavy, relentless machinery shaking the building with the tremor of its action.

"I haven't the habit of playing. You know the rules."

Timothy nodded awkwardly, crumpling his cap between his large red hands as he retreated.

There was something more than defeat in the odd gaze he did not remove from his employer.

"All right, Mr. Harding," he submitted. "All right." He paused, his hand on the door-knob. "But you'd ought to get the habit of it, sir!" he burst forth suddenly.

"It's fine to have a play-day, an' heartenin'! You're young yet, sir, but time's slippin'. No offense, sir, but there's a time for bustin' out, harmless like."

He was through the doorway before his amazed master found speech, and closed the door between them.

Roger Harding rested his arms on his desk-top, a sheet of plate-glass over finest wood.

His own face reflected in the lustrous surface, his gray eyes looking up at him.

A play-day? In all the thoughtfully regulated life his father and mother had arranged for him there had been no such day as that.

"Rich men's sons usually grow up idle fools," Mr. Harding senior once had said. "Mine won't."

Roger had not. Before he was thirty he had assumed absolute control of the great manufactory and business of Harding & Son.

His father retired, satisfied with the successor into whose hands he put all. Roger had justified the trust, and his training.

But there never had been any time for him to play; not in the sense that Timothy meant. He had been kept too busy for that.

Of course, there had been regular hours for relaxation. He had not missed the other thing. At least—

The face reflected in the glass smiled unmirthfully.

There were times, usually on streets filled with gay, laughing young people assembled by holidays or the theater hour, when he

had felt an aching aloofness, a dull, unanalyzed desire.

Mr. Harding stood up, threw an assortment of papers into a dress-suit case waiting beside him and, closing it, rang for a clerk to take it down to his limousine.

The day was finished, six o'clock was heralded by the noisy whistles. But the master of the factory was going into New York to an evening meeting of business men; his working-day would end near midnight. Of course, he would first go home and dine, in the coldly handsome family residence. His father and mother were passing this spring in Europe.

Opposite one of the desks in the outer office he paused.

"Marshall, when Timothy Shea comes in to-night, you may tell him that I will try him again," he directed.

It was eight o'clock that evening when Roger Harding stepped off the New Jersey train.

His first glance was for a porter; seeing none, he jerked his dress-suit case off the platform with less than his usual deliberation and plunged into the hooded stairway descending to the Hudson tube.

The rain was falling in sheets.

Mr. Harding wore glasses, and the wet effectually blurred his vision as he hurried from the semidarkness of the platform into the lighted stairway. There was a figure ahead of him.

So much he mistily noted—then his heel slipped on the damp cement!

The stairs were short and Mr. Harding was young; the fall injured him not at all. The dress-suit case caromed after him and they alighted almost simultaneously, equally unharmed. But—the other traveler?

With an appalled sense of guilt, Mr. Harding wiped dry and resumed the *pince-nez*, then turned back.

Yes, it was a girl!

A small, slight girl, gowned in the extreme of fashion, who clung to the railing against which she had been thrown, and looked down at the young man with the largest, most piteous dark eyes he had ever seen.

She wore a clinging gown of dark-green satin under a half-length evening coat; her piquant, plumed hat was a daring frame for her piquant, dimpled face with its childish purity of tint and line.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, encountering the gentleman's glance. "Oh!"

"You are hurt?" he questioned anxiously. "I—there really isn't any fit apology, but I am most ashamed."

"Oh, never mind apologies," she besought, in a voice like some gay little instrument agitatedly played. "Please help me think what I can do!"

"You are hurt?" scanning her in consternation.

From pink her cheeks became carmine. "No, I'm sorry to say! If I were, at least they would send an ambulance for me. It is—it's my gown."

Harding again looked. As he already had noted, she was dressed in the mode of New York and Paris—against that narrow, short, green satin skirt the dress-suit case had struck in falling; the garment was split to the knee. And, alas for modernity, it was no mass of ruffled lingerie that met the eye, but a diminutive, high-laced satin boot and a glimpse of silken hosiery.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Harding, then recognized his maladroitness and felt his color rival the lady's. "I—that is—permit me to call a taxicab."

"You can't bring a taxi in here," she returned patiently. "And I certainly am not going across in the tunnel train, or up through that crowded depot. Please think of something else."

Harding gripped his suit-case desperately. He was painfully without experience. He had been too busy to observe women other than his mother, and she did not wear clinging, tissue-paper frocks without petticoats.

"Couldn't you—pin it?" he ventured. The girl regarded him, mutely derisive, then regarded the dress-suit case, ignoring the hopeless suggestion.

"Are you, perhaps, married?" she wondered. "You, you haven't anything there that I might borrow?"

He shook his head with the feeling of being criminally remiss.

"No. There is nothing here but papers and specimens of ore. I was on my way to a business engagement this evening."

"I was on the way to a theater engagement. My brother was to meet me across the river, in the New York station. But now, of course, I cannot go."

To the theater! The destination exactly accorded with Harding's thoughts of her.

She was one of the gay, daintily vivid throng he had watched stream by him.

Only an eddy in the current of life had swept her aside into his reach.

"Perhaps your brother will come over to look for you when you fail to meet him," he mechanically suggested, his attention on her, not the speech.

She moved her small head in denial.

She wore her thick, smooth auburn hair parted and massed in three lustrous coils low on her neck, in a fashion new to Harding, but which he found enchanting.

"No," she regretted. "He will think I did not come because it rained."

There was a pause.

"Perhaps you would accept my raincoat?" Harding offered. "If we only could reach a taxicab, we could drive to a shop and buy—er—something."

"The shops would be closed," she demurred. "And," her red lips curved and parted deliciously across a flash of white, "your raincoat might be more proper, but hardly less conspicuous, you know."

Impulsively Harding touched the little white-gloved hand she had playfully flung out.

"You are so kind about it!" he exclaimed impetuously. "It is all my fault, my clumsiness. If ever a man deserved punishment, I do—and you haven't spoken a reproach!"

She laughed with an outbreak of dimples, her surprised eyes glinting behind her curling black lashes.

"You didn't *mean* to do it," she consoled. "I was dreadfully afraid you had been hurt. Of course, I must just go back—Some one is coming!"

The door at the foot of the stairs had swung open.

Indeed, only at this odd hour and during a storm could their solitude have endured so long. With a swift impulse of protection, Harding interposed his tall figure between the dismayed girl and the ascending travelers, bending to engage her in conversation he strove to make casual.

She comprehended at once and lifted her face to him with pretty attention.

"It's too bad we are late for the theater," Harding found himself babbling. "It, it really is too bad! We must think of the next best thing to do now."

The little procession was level with them; had passed.

Harding resentfully observed a pair of young men look back at his companion and overheard a murmur of "Peach!"

He would have relished flinging them down the stairs and through the door at the bottom.

Suppose she had been alone? What was any one thinking of to allow her to be alone? He would have liked half a minute with her brother.

Never in his life had he felt anything quite like that hot surge of wrath.

"Of course," her voice crossed his thoughts, "I must go back on the next train to Englewood."

"Go back?" he repeated, startled.

"Certainly. There is nothing else *to* do, is there? If I get on quickly and squeeze into a corner no one will notice. There will not be many people at this hour, I hope. It's too late, or too early."

Harding drew a long breath.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "We will take a train, if you think best. I will look at a time-table, if you permit, and see what one we can get."

The girl gasped, her lovely eyes widening.

"We? But you are going the other way, into New York!"

He paused, the blue time-table gripped in his fingers.

There was something metallic in the setting of his jaw; the men at Mr. Harding's factory could have supplied some illustrations of what was to be expected when their employer's countenance took that expression.

The other way? Lift his hand from this bright-winged, sunshine-born creature who had fluttered into his grasp and go the other way?

"Pardon me; I must claim the privilege of seeing you to your home," he stated firmly. "Do not refuse the only practical apology I can make. Since there is no one to do it for me, allow me to introduce myself—"

She checked him with a gesture, smiling and coloring.

"Oh, but I know you, Mr. Harding! Every one in Englewood does, you see. And once you gave me a box of bonbons, when I was six and you were sixteen, although we never met socially, and you never knew me."

"I?" stupefied.

"You! It was Christmas Eve, and you were in a sleigh, waiting for some one, I imagine. You looked at me, and I called: 'Merry Christmas, boy!'"

"I suppose I believed the season re-

quired it. Anyway, you snatched a package from beside you and put it into my arms. And you said 'Thank you,' which puzzled me very much."

"I remember very well," Harding said quietly. His dark face had become quite pale. "I don't suppose you can conceive how lonely I was. Will you tell me your name?"

"Oh, forgive me! I am Dulcie Fenton."

The next train left in an hour. Harding divested himself of his raincoat.

"Please put it on," he requested. "You see, as we have no umbrella, it will pass as a natural enough attempt to protect you from the rain. Only we must not go where it is dry."

She laughed light-heartedly, but suffered him to put her into the ample garment.

Harding turned the sleeves half-way back before her hands became visible, and the coat's hem trailed on the steps.

"Must we stay here?" she doubted.

"Certainly not. We can go up to the roofed platform; it is not very light or crowded. Perhaps you will consent to beguile time with some of the soda-fountain beverages."

"I could not go—"

"I will bring them out to you, if I may."

She laughed again, lifting the trailing lengths of cloth to climb the stairs with him.

Harding found a bench where they were in comparative seclusion. And while she drank chocolate, he studied her with avid attention, devouring details. Everything about her enchanted him.

He liked the *chic* daintiness of her dress, the audacity of her plumed hat, even the way she ate all the whipped cream from the surface with her spoon before drinking the chocolate. She caught him watching that maneuver, and dimpled rosily.

"I always eat the sugar on my cakes, *first*," she informed him. "Then, if there *should* be an earthquake or a cataclysm of any kind, I will have had the best part, anyhow. Besides, I can't wait for goodies."

"I was brought up to expect no sugar on my cakes," he dryly answered. "If by any chance there was some, it was to be put aside for the future."

"But," puzzled, "it would not keep."

"I think," said Roger Harding, "that I have found that out just in time. And also, that the sugar is of as much value as the cake."

She regarded him, and he her. What was it the driver, Timothy, had said: "My girl had a holiday, an' what use was it to her without me?"

Harding knew, now, that he had envied the man that loyal comradeship.

If there had been the slightest artificiality in the expression of the girl he looked at, the least lack of candor in her glance, all would have been ruined for him.

But there was not; she was sincere and steady-eyed as a boy. She, too, would have but one playfellow, he felt.

"This is going to be a beginning, is it not?" he asked abruptly. "You are going to let me see you often."

She moved, catching a quick breath.

"I am sorry, Mr. Harding; to-morrow I am leaving Englewood. My brother is going away for months, and I am going with him. Perhaps we will never return. We have only each other."

Harding stiffened and little white lines came into view about his mouth.

For a moment he stood still, then he stooped and took her empty cup.

At the soda-fountain, where he returned the cups, he encountered one of his business acquaintances.

"Good evening," the man greeted, his curious eyes fixed on the two china vessels. "I was going to ask you if you were coming my way, but I see you are not traveling alone."

Harding paused to look at him with chill repulsion of comment.

"No," he briefly confirmed. "My *fiancée* is with me."

He went to a telephone-booth before returning to Dulcie Fenton, and called up a Jersey City garage.

All the repression of his life reacted now in this revolt, all his unused emotions rose in Titanic force and hurled down law, reason, custom—whatever stood between him and his desire.

Never again would he be the man his father had reared; he was alive, consciously alive, and fiercely tenacious of that life.

The girl was leaning forward to watch the door through which Harding had departed, when he came up to her from another direction.

"I was afraid," she exclaimed with relief, then checked herself. "I mean, I think it must be time for the train."

She had feared he would not return in time to go with her.

The certainty she had meant that ran hotly through Harding's veins. But he looked down into her flushed face and deliberately lied.

"I am sorry," he declared. "There has been a freight train derailed across our tracks, and there will be no train out until early morning."

She uttered a low cry, all her color vanishing.

"I have phoned for an automobile," he continued after a moment. "I hope, since I am the cause of all this, you will allow me to drive you to your home. It is only a half-hour trip, you know."

Surprised and grateful she hesitated. But it was a girl's instinctive recoil from the unconventional, not in any distrust of her companion.

As she had told him, every one in their native town knew Mr. Roger Harding.

"You are very good to me," she slowly yielded. "I suppose there is nothing else to do—no other way less—less a burden to you?"

"It is not a burden," he denied. "It is a favor I am asking! I want it; I want—"

He broke the sentence sharply, on the verge of saying he wanted her. He had to grip himself; he, who never acted on impulse!

"The car should be at the door now," he added with his usual quietness. "Will you not give me this pleasure?"

She rose without affecting reluctance, with a graceful docility.

They reached the automobile without the young girl's costume being especially remarked.

Harding put her into the seat beside his own, wrapping her in rugs before taking his place.

Under the car's top, behind its windshield, the rain was not felt.

"I am driving myself," he observed.

She nodded assent, contented that he should so dispose.

That unquestioning trust struck the man like a blow in the face.

His hands fell from the levers and he turned swiftly in his seat, facing her in the reflected light of the car's lamps.

"I lied to you," he avowed in rough passion. "The train will run. I wanted to take you home this way, where I could speak freely, not before a trainful of prying meddlers. Before God, I mean you no wrong. Will you ride with me?"

Stunned, she gazed at him, her eyes black pools in her small, white face.

"Will you ride with me, or must I take you back? I have only to-night; to-morrow you would go away. Are you afraid of me?"

She slowly shook her head, still gazing at him.

With a jar Harding sent the car forward in a leap like the leap of his own pulses.

Through the dripping, glistening city they rolled, out into the rain-swept highway.

Miasmatic mists rose from the stretches of Jersey marsh below them and were blown smokelike across the white rays of the search-lights.

The day's traffic was over; the two in the car were absolutely alone.

"I know little of all I should know in order to talk to you," Harding spoke out of the long silence. "I never learned how to talk to a young girl; I had no time. I've missed about everything worth while, and only found it out to-night. But when I saw you, I knew what I wanted.

"I want you to sit at the foot of my table; I want you to ride in my motor-cars, and to find you waiting for me in one when I come down from my office.

"I want you to fill my house with flowers and perfume and color; to buy you extravagant gowns, jewels, useless pets—all the things that belong to women like you. Will you marry me?"

"You don't know me!" she cried, her clear little voice shattered into crystalline fragments. "You—you just met me!"

"I know myself," answered Roger Harding. "I want you."

"But—"

He interrupted her with a fierce gesture.

"Do not talk of me; I am fixed in this. I am not a boy; if you refuse me, there never will be any one else. I shall go on living as I have lived—you know how that has been. Will you take me?"

He heard her panting through the dark.

"You—don't—know me!"

"I know enough. Would I know you better if I drank tea at your house on a dozen occasions and exchanged banalities with you among a crowd of people? Yet, if I had done so, you would not question my proposal."

A suburban trolley-car flared across their path, wet and glaring with light.

When they were again in darkness she spoke.

"I never attended a tea in my life, Mr. Harding. My aunt keeps a shop to sell her embroideries, and I am going to be a dancer on the vaudeville stage."

There was a pause.

"Well?" he queried.

"Will you pretend it doesn't make a difference?" she flashed out, suddenly vehement. "Will you pretend you do not care; you, whom even your own people are afraid of?"

"Oh, it does make a difference—it does, it does! You never supposed I was not a girl of your own set or you would not have spoken. Please take me home and go away."

"I do not go to teas, either," he returned, never more calmly. "I am a manufacturer, not a cotillion leader. I have put all my hopes in life into my question: will you marry me?"

"My aunt was a famous dancer forty years ago," she said, after a moment. "But she was hurt in an accident, so she could dance no more. She supported herself by her exquisite needlework.

"When my brother and I were left orphans, she took charge of us. She is very brave and good. I learned to embroider as she does, and to dance.

"She wanted it, and Louis—my brother—is an actor. To-morrow he is starting to tour the smaller cities, and I will go with him to commence. I shall be frightened, at first; I could not dare New York."

Her voice died away.

"You *would have been* frightened," he corrected her statement, his own voice unsteadied. "You will not leave me?"

She caught her breath, then suddenly broke down in tears.

"You don't mean it," she sobbed. "No! No!"

"I do."

"You—"

It was not Harding's fault at all; even though his attention was centered on the girl.

The storm had extinguished the red lantern hung as a warning before a heap of building material.

The car struck with a terrifying crash, reeled aside, and rolled over.

An ambulance from Englewood soon arrived, summoned over the telephone by a hysterical woman in the nearest house.

Harding awoke to find lights glaring in his face and men bending over him.

Some one was trying to disengage a soft substance he held in his clenched fingers, he became aware. Harding tightened his grip and fought for speech. Perceiving his effort, the surgeon gave him something to drink, with a word of encouragement.

"Dulcie?" the patient gasped, using the name deliberately and with intention.

"The young lady? She's all right; not a scratch! What?"

"My *fiancée*," Harding uttered clearly.

The surgeon met his eyes and gravely nodded.

"Glad of it, sir. I'll see the newspapers get it that way. Now—"

But Harding raised himself on the man's arm.

He at last had realized what the soft fabric was that he held; he even remembered grasping it.

He dragged the satin folds closer.

"Dulcie," he begged. "Dulcie!"

The girl yielded to his effort. Her delicate face was colorless, her eyes were heavy

with tears, and the storm had beaten to soddenness her dainty, fanciful attire.

"Dulcie, I can feel that something is broken," he panted. "I won't be able to follow you for a while. Don't send me home alone! Let them bring a clergyman—marry me now."

"No!" she faltered. "Oh, no!"

"You—do not want me?"

"It isn't *that*!"

He wound his fingers into the satin.

"If you don't want me, Dulcie, go. But don't leave me for any reason but that. I want you—I love you. Dulcie, this is my day; to-morrow might cheat me of you. Come now—come home. Dulcie?"

She swayed nearer as he drew her, beseeching her with the fevered anxiety and suspense of his gaze; their hands touched.

Abruptly Harding drew her bright head down to him, and their lips met.

The surgeon hastily turned his back.

"Broke a slat," he confided to his aid.

"He'll be out in a week. Better get them home, what?"

THE DAY THAT IS

By Beech Hilton

SAY! What's the use of talkin' 'bout the days that used to be?
They're dead an' gone an' can't be lived again by you or me;
But here's a *live one*—here's *to-day*, all spick an' span an' new—
Let's see if we can't fill it full of things that's good to do!

Let's keep it clean in thought an' word an' deed, the while we work
At some of them hard jobs we've long allowed ourselves to shirk;
An' while we dig an' delve away, to keep us in the swing
Let's all join in some sunny song an' help each other sing!

I ain't no blame *Caruso*, an' as far as I can hear
In all the bunch there ain't one voice that's half-way true nor clear;
But, if we sing our loudest an' we're meanin' ev'ry word,
The sound'll be the *cheerest* thing a feller ever heard!

So, grab your pick and shovel, or your hammer or your pen,
An' we'll put in the derndest day of hustle known to men;
For what's the use of talkin' 'bout the days that's out of biz,
When here's a chance to put some dents in this big day that IS!